Economic analysis of service and delivery interventions in health care

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Scientific summary

Health economists consider a variety of topics and this includes the demand for care, the supply of services, the relationship between demand and supply, the efficiency and equity of service provision and resource allocation, and the evaluation of clinical and service interventions, policy initiatives and wholesale health system reorganisations. Health economists have developed a wide range of techniques for economic evaluation of the relative costs and benefits of clinical interventions, but they also have an important role to play in understanding and evaluating service interventions. Although not different in principle from other forms of intervention, there are a number of distinctive issues that come to the fore with service interventions, including dealing with non-randomised study designs, diffuse effects, wider system impacts, and heterogeneity in implementation and impacts. Recent developments include methods to produce aggregate estimates of programme impacts on patient health before and after introduction, measure patient and professional preferences, and capture opportunity costs. Alongside evidence on relative costs and benefits to inform decision-making, there is an important role for descriptive economic analysis of service interventions to produce generalisable learning about the mechanics of the care system. Future work should focus on producing evidence on cost-effectiveness, increasing our understanding of the production process and the behaviour of agents in care systems, and contributing to interdisciplinary process and outcome evaluations.
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This report

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